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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

THE HERO-INDIVIDUAL IN THE BALLADS OF

K. F. RYLEEV

by

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The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies for acceptance, a thesis entitled "The Hero-Individual in the Ballads of K.F. Ryleev" submitted by Ching C. Wu in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

THE HERO-INDIVIDUAL IN THE BALLADS OF K. F. RYLEEV

(An Abstract)

The Russian Decembrist poets, or as they are also known, the "active" romanticists, were a unique literary phenomenon in the history of Russian literature of the first decades of the nineteenth century. The idealistic poet, Kondraty Fedorovich Ryleev, was not only the main representative of this group, but was also a driving force behind the movement for political and social reform in Russian society at that time.

Ryleev's dumas or ballads, largely unlike the traditional folk legends, were one of his major claims to literary fame, and although they suffered from serious artistic shortcomings, they had an impact on his contemporaries much greater than their purely artistic value merited. A hero-individual characterized all of his ballads, although the goals motivating them were varied. Of major significance were his ballads devoted to legendary Russian warriors, to selfless fighters against alien oppressors, and to those challenging the authority of Russian tyrants and espousing the cause of freedom and justice. These poems feature a pronounced strain of Russian patriotism; elements of subjectivity are present; and the characterization is of a black-white nature. Yet, Ryleev's ballads give the reader some conception of the progressive attitudes characterizing many of his contemporaries.

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PREFACE

This study of the dumas of Kondraty Ryleev does not purport to be of an exhaustive nature, as it is only an attempt to throw some light on the work of this lesser-known Russian poet. Since his ballads comprise a significant part of his literary work, a study devoted to them goes some way in achieving this end.

This study is arranged in the following manner: the first chapter traces the historical evolution of the radical secret societies in Russia in the first three decades of the nineteenth century (major emphasis is placed on the Decembrist societies of the 1820's), and concludes with an account of the biography of a major Decembrist poet Ryleev; the second, third, and fourth concern the hero-individuals of his ballads. The motivations and goals of the heroes are what sets them apart from each other. Thus, the second chapter is devoted to Russian historical warriors; the third to those struggling against alien oppression, and the fourth to fighters for freedom and justice for the Russian people. A concluding chapter is concerned with the most important features characterizing all of the ballads dealt with in this study.

The value of the study lies in its subject. The so-called "active" romanticists have, until comparatively recently, concerned literary scholars only to a relatively minor degree. Since the October Revolution considerably more attention has been paid them by Soviet critics, several works have appeared (e.g., V. N. Orlov's Dekabristy (The Decembrists) and A. G. Tseitlin's Tvorchestvo Ryleeva (Ryleev's Work)), but western students of Russian literature have devoted but scant attention to them. Furthermore, a study

of a major representative of this group of poets has a value transcending purely literary boundaries, as their work affords the reader an insight into the historical and political events of the early part of the nineteenth century through the words of one who was a major participant in them.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Historical Situation in Russia at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century

The Enlightenment of the eighteenth century had a considerable impact on Russian intellectual society through the medium of imported literature (interrupted during the brief reign of the "Mad Tsar" Paul). Furthermore, Russian intellectuals became more aware of liberal thought as a result of contemporary Russian works on social themes. This was but a beginning, however, and merely had the effect of fostering dissatisfaction toward the autocratic order; revolution was still far from the minds of the "enlightened".

Thus, in contrast to the large scale revolutionary ferment in western Europe during the last decades of the eighteenth and the first decade of the nineteenth century, even moderately liberal ideas were only beginning to be felt in Russia at that time. Historically, with the exception of brief periods in which relatively liberal policies were followed, the autocracy had effectively sealed Russia off from outside events and ideas. Successive governments were dedicated to maintaining the status quo. Any opposition to the established order, whether moderate or radical, was regarded as a threat. During Alexander's reign (1801-1825), liberal writers, expressing sympathy for the peasants, were summarily punished; peasant revolts were mercilessly quelled; even the moderate in government were considered inimical to the best interests of the regime.

The final defeat of Napoleon marked a turning point in European political developments. On the one hand, his defeat put an end to his aggressive campaigns, while on the other it unfortunately saw the inception of a reactionary coalition of the victorious powers. With a view to preserving the Old Order, threatened by an upsurge of revolutionary sentiment caused by Napoleon, the victors at the Congress of Vienna in 1814 adopted the so-called "sacred principle of legitimacy". The following year Alexander I was instrumental in setting up the reactionary "Holy Alliance", and in the immediately succeeding years accepted the role of "Policeman of Europe".

The "Fatherland War"¹ of 1812 bore a national character and witnessed a general flourishing of patriotism in the Russian people. With the defeat of Napoleon in Russia, the Russian Army moved westward in its triumphant march through Europe. While in western Europe, many Russian officers had the opportunity of first-hand contact with liberal and revolutionary ideas set in motion by the French Revolution. Some of them had already read the writings of such "unorthodox" writers as Adam Smith, Benjamin Franklin, Lord Byron,² and Jeremy Bentham.³ Consequently a number of them became interested in the experience of such revolutionary secret societies as the Carbonari⁴ in Italy (later in France) and the Tugendbund⁵ in Germany.

¹ The name given the war against Napoleon by Soviet writers.

² Byron's advocacy of freedom and individualism became in the 1820's an important force of political rebellion and revolution in Russia. His influence among the Decembrists was particularly great. They profoundly admired Byron -- the fighter for the freedom of Greece. In 1824 Ryleev, a staunch admirer of Byron, dedicated his poem "On the Death of Byron" to the great Bard.

³ Antole Mazour, The First Russian Revolution (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1937), p. 54.

⁴ Marc Slonim, The Epic of Russian Literature, New York, 1950, p. 71; and Encyclopedia Americana, 1963, v. 27, p. 132.

⁵ Encyclopedia Americana, 1963, v. 27, p. 132.

Upon their return to Russia they were disappointed to find that it had changed little as a result of the victorious war against Napoleon; indeed, the situation had worsened. The sovereign was primarily occupied with his reactionary foreign policies, while the internal administration was entrusted to the notoriously cruel Count Arakcheev. One of Arakcheev's fundamental innovations was the establishment of the "military settlements";⁶ these especially were the cause of general discontent among the masses. Soldiers, for example, were appalled at the prospect of retiring to a military settlement after twenty five years of service. The serfs were subjected to increasingly oppressive policies. The idealistic youth, appalled at the unjust nature of the Old Regime, began considering the possibility of change and concrete actions to this end. In short, many Russians were loath to be reconciled to a continuation of arbitrary autocratic rule at home after their glorious victory over a foreign autocracy.

Evolution of the Secret Societies

In February of 1816 the first short-lived Russian secret society was founded in St. Petersburg under the name "Union of Salvation" or "Society of the True and Faithful Sons of the Fatherland". The founders of this society --- which had about thirty members --- were Alexander Muraviev,

⁶Count A. A. Arakcheev (1769-1834), from 1808 War Minister, from 1810 Chairman of the Department of Affairs of War of the Council of State Government of Alexander I. The military settlements were established to provide the Tsar with a ready and economic store of manpower for his wars. People (including women and children) on these settlements lived according to rigid military discipline, and the whole resembled a vast jail-like barracks. Inevitably uprisings broke out --- noteworthy among them that of the Chuguev settlement --- all suppressed mercilessly on Arakcheev's order.

Nikita Muraviev, Sergei Trubetskoi, Sergei Muraviev-Apostol, Matvei Muraviev-Apostol, and Ivan Yakushkin. Pavel Pestel, the radical activist, joined later. The fundamental aims of this organization were two: the abolition of serfdom and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy. Unfortunately, ways of accomplishing these ends were not specified and remained unclear to its members. Arguments inevitably arose and led, in 1817, to the society's dissolution.

The second secret society, "Union of Prosperity", was formed at the beginning of 1818. In essence, it was a continuation — with significant reorganization — of the "Union of Salvation". It had a membership of about 200 and a constitution modelled after that of the Tugendbund, with slight modifications. The first part of the constitution, Zelenaiia kniga (Green Book), which was common knowledge to all the members of the Society, was concerned with the Society's prime purpose: the dissemination of enlightenment and charity. In the constitution's second part, Chernaiia kniga (Black Book), the content of which was known only to the higher echelons of the Society, its secret aims were held to be the liquidation of serfdom and the autocratic order and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy in the country. However, according to the 1820 convention of the Supreme Council, the highest administrative organ of the Society, Pestel proposed that a republican system be the goal, and that force be the method used to achieve this goal. According to the Pestel group, the revolt of the Semenov Regiment⁷ in 1820

⁷ The Semenov Regiment was the most favored and beloved of Alexander I. Many of its officers were participants in the Decembrist movement. Relations between privates and officers were cordial and the shameful corporal punishment had been abolished. In 1820 Arakcheev and the Grand Duke Mikhail Pavlovich succeeded in dismissing General Potemkin, an excellent and highly respected officer, and appointed in his place Colonel Schwarz. Immediately after taking over his duties, Schwarz restored corporal punishment and introduced brutal and humiliating penalties. On October 16, 1820, a number of soldiers, whose chests were decorated with the highest honor, the cross of St. George, were flogged. This action violated an old tradition, for members of the Order of St. George were usually exempt from such a penalty. Next evening, the soldiers of the First Company declared to their captain that they could no longer endure the existing conditions and that he must accept the complaint against Colonel Schwarz. The Captain attempted to persuade them to withdraw the complaint, but they refused. The next day, the First Company was placed under arrest in the fortress, but the remaining eleven companies immediately demanded either the release of their comrades and the dismissal of "that German" or that they be allowed to join their imprisoned comrades. The authorities sent the whole regiment to the fortress and later dispersed it among various military units. See Mazour, pp. 58-60.

was further proof that any changes would have to be brought about by force. Warnings received from the Society's sympathizers concerning the government's successful infiltration of the Society prompted its leaders to dissolve it in 1821.

The Decembrist Societies and Their Programmes

A new secret society⁸ was then organized into two branches --- the northern branch located in St. Petersburg and the southern branch in Tulchin, near Kiev --- for purposes of agitating for radical reform. The Northern Society was first headed by Nikita Muraviev who, in his proposed constitution for the future Russia, advocated a constitutional monarchy. Further policies proposed included retention of the emperor, but in the position of "first clerk" of the land, and a restrictive electoral franchise based on property qualifications. Serfs were to be freed without acquiring the land (later, under pressure from the radicals Muraviev proposed that they be given some land). Eventually, he did not rule out the possibility of a republican Russia, should the emperor reject the Society's proposals. It would be fair to say that the draft constitution of the Northern Society was far too moderate to be acceptable to many of its members.

The Southern Society was founded in Tulchin under the leadership of Pestel, the author of the radical constitution called "Russkaia pravda" (Russian Truth). He proposed the immediate establishment of a republic, abolition of serfdom, the granting of political rights to all males above the

⁸ Later known as the Decembrist Society.

age of 20, regardless of property⁹. In his agrarian reform, half of the land of the landowners was to be transferred to district administration, from which every citizen could obtain a plot of land for his own use.

In 1823, a new leader of the Northern Society, Kondraty Ryleev, emerged. Ryleev, who became an ardent republican the following year, joined together with other radicals including the three Bestuzhev brothers, Eugene Obolensky, Ivan Pushchin, Peter Kakhovsky, Alexander Odoevsky, Wilhelm Kiukhelbeker, and Alexander Yakubovich in laying the actual groundwork for the uprising. In 1824 Pestel arrived in St. Petersburg from the south and attempted to persuade the Northern Society to adopt the aims set out in "Russkaia pravda". Although a proportion of the Society's members supported Pestel's much more radical programme, it was not officially adopted. Yet, despite this disagreement, the Northern Society passed a resolution providing for a joint, co-ordinated uprising with the Southern Society set for 1826.

Revolt of December 14, 1825, and its Consequences

Alexander I died on November 19, 1825. Since he did not have any children, Constantine, who was serving at that time as Governor-General of Poland, was naturally considered heir to the throne. In 1823, in an exchange of letters, Alexander had made Constantine renounce his right of succession due to the latter's marriage to a Polish lady who was not of royal descent, thus this right passed automatically to Nicholas. This transfer of the right of succession was never formally proclaimed. Because of the danger of disorder Nicholas decided not to take the throne immediately; he had his troops take the oath

⁹ Bol'shaia sovetskaia entsiklopediia (Moscow, 2nd ed., 1950), v. 13, p. 576.

to Constantine. Meanwhile he asked Constantine to come to St. Petersburg either to be crowned, or to officially confirm his former renunciation. Constantine replied that he wanted neither to reign, nor to go to the capital. Nicholas then declared December 14 to be the date of taking the oath again, this time to himself.¹⁰

The period of interregnum prompted the Northern Society to act prematurely. The Society's members decided to take advantage of the occasion of the taking of the oath to revolt, despite the formerly agreed upon plan that both branches revolt simultaneously: time was pressing and victory in the capital, in their view, would have decisive influence on the course of events in the whole country.

On December 14, 1825, about 3,000 rebel troops led by their officers, members of the Northern Society, came out on Senate Square. These troops were overwhelmingly outnumbered by the government forces, and their gunfire was quickly silenced. The poorly prepared and executed rebellion failed the very same day. Dozens of bodies were left on the square. Many of its participants were arrested.

The news of the failure of the uprising in St. Petersburg reached members of the Southern Society and sparked the revolt of the Chernigov Regiment (commanded by officers belonging to the Southern Society). This revolt lasted for five days and involved a disorganized march on Kiev by Decembrist-inspired military units. On January 3, 1826, the march was halted and its participants routed by General Geismar: its leaders --- Muraviev-Apostol and Bestuzhev Riumin --- were arrested.

¹⁰ Ibid., v. 22, p. 419. Alexander (1777-1825) was the first son of Paul I, and Constantine (1779-1831) was the second. The murder of Paul I in 1801 brought Alexander to the throne. In 1815 Constantine became Governor-General of Poland when Alexander made him Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Army.

Following the uprising, 579 persons were tried by a special tribunal, whose members were appointed by Nicholas I. Five leaders --- Ryleev, Kakhovsky, Pestel, Muraviev-Apostol, and Bestuzhev Riumin --- were sentenced to drawing and quartering, which Nicholas later commuted to hanging. They were executed on July 13, 1826. The remainder --- almost all of the active participants in the uprising --- were exiled to Siberia on sentences of hard labor. Many, upon completion of their sentences, settled there permanently, while some later volunteered to fight in the Caucasus, where the war against the mountaineers was raging.

The Decembrist Poets

Many of the most outspoken opponents of the regime came from the intellectual elite of society. They included poets, novelists, and literary critics, whose works, by and large socially-oriented, reflect their progressive views. Much of the poetry of the poets involved is permeated by a spirit of patriotism. An analysis of the ballads of the most important of these, Kondraty Ryleev, is the subject of this thesis. His poems, generally, are full of sympathy for the oppressed Russian people, and reflect their desire for freedom, their aspirations for justice, and their hatred for tyranny. This drive for justice and freedom was intimately bound up with their profound love for Russia, which Ryleev hoped would finally arise from its inertia, backwardness, and ignorance.

Biography of Kondraty Fedorovich Ryleev

Kondraty Fedorovich Ryleev was born on September 18, 1795, in the village of Batovo in the province of St. Petersburg. The Ryleevs were of the petty gentry, and military service had been the rule for generations. Indeed, Kondraty's father, Fedor, retired as a lieutenant colonel. The living conditions of the Ryleevs were comparatively poor, and even money for the education of the children was lacking. So, at the age of six, Kondraty was enrolled by his parents as a "volunteer" in the First Cadet School in St. Petersburg, which at the time had an enrollment of more than 1,000 students. Its principal, F.M. Klinger, a German poet, believed in the efficacy of Prussian drills and the rod in the education of cadets. Therefore, unlike the calm, undisturbed early years of Pushkin at Tsarskoe Selo, Ryleev's years of schooling were harsh and unenviable.

At the age of eighteen, while still a cadet, Ryleev began his literary career. Inspired by the patriotic sentiments that arose spontaneously in Russia as a result of the Napoleonic invasion, Ryleev wrote his "Love for the Fatherland" on the death of General Kutuzov. This was the first of many of his patriotic poems on a historical theme. The following year he graduated from the Cadet School, and was immediately sent to the front. He joined the triumphant campaigns through The Dukedom of Warsaw, Prussia, Bavaria, Switzerland, and France. The revival of military operations against Napoleon after his escape from the Island of Elba resulted in Ryleev's return to active duty. In all he spent approximately eighteen months outside of Russia. In the immediately ensuing years, in which the domestic rule of Count Arakcheev became increasingly reactionary and intolerable, many progressive officers retired from the army. Ryleev, too, found conditions

impossible. In a letter to his mother he wrote: "The service today requires scoundrels; unfortunately, I cannot be one and therefore will not derive anything from it [the army]¹¹". In December, 1818, Ryleev was dismissed from the service because of "domestic circumstances".¹²

Ryleev's life and literary works were connected with the Ukraine, where he lived from 1817 to 1820. He spent some time in Kiev and Kharkov. He knew the Ukrainian language and folk poetry, studied Ukrainian history, way of life, customs, and was acquainted with a number of Ukrainian writers, such as M. Markewych, O. Somov, O. Kornylovych, and the folklorist M. Tsertelev.¹³

In 1819 he married Teviashuevaia, the daughter of a retired army major and landowner of Voronezh. They moved to St. Petersburg soon after their marriage. Ryleev's stay in St. Petersburg was very conducive to the development of his literary talents. In 1820 he published his satiric poem "To the Favorite", in which he daringly ridiculed the all-powerful Count Arakcheev. In order that the poem be passed by the censor, he approached his subject indirectly, and analogously and metaphorically linked the contemporary tyranny to that of Julius Caesar; in support of this view, he supplied a subtitle to the poem "In Imitation of the Satire of Persius". He believed that once the censor had passed this poem for publication, Arakcheev could not bring himself to admit that he himself was its subject.¹⁴ The poem was published

¹¹ A.G. Tseitlin, Tvorchestvo Ryleeva (Moscow, 1955), p. 31.

¹² Ibid., p. 32.

¹³ Ukrains'ka radians'ka entsyklopediia, v. 12 (Kiev, 1963), p. 240. Also see I. Zaslavsky, Ryleev i rosiys'ko-ukrains'ki literaturni vzaimy (Kiev, 1958).

¹⁴ V.N. Orlov, Dekabristy (Moscow:Leningrad, 1951), p. 615.

and was a veritable sensation. Ryleev thus came to the fore in literary circles of the capital. He was elected a member of the "Free Society of the Lovers of Russian Literature", a legal branch of the secret society, "Union of Prosperity". In this way he came under the influence of revolutionary ideas and became a member of the secret society.

In 1821 Ryleev became an assessor at the criminal court of St. Petersburg. His work in this position won him the reputation of an ardent advocate of justice. Furthermore, it had an effect on the evolution of his political views, because it afforded him the opportunity of witnessing at first hand the misery of the peasants and the corruption of the bureaucracy. He left this work in 1824 to accept a managerial position in the Russo-American Company, a gigantic commercial and industrial enterprise concerned with exploiting the resources of Alaska.

In June, 1821, Ryleev began to write his dumas.¹⁵ The inception of this genre in his poetry marked a significant turn in his literary evolution. As distinct from the negative approach he used in exposing and assailing evil (e.g., "To the Favorite"), his dumas were positive in their praise and glorification of the "righteous". Those praised in the dumas were past heroes, however, and much of the historical material used by Ryleev was taken from N.M. Karamzin's renowned History of the Russian State. In addition, under the influence of the dumas of J. Niemcewicz,¹⁶ he also

¹⁵ Duma is the Ukrainian word for ballad. Starting with the following chapter, dumas will be referred to as ballads.

¹⁶ Niemcewicz (1757-1841) graduated from the Warsaw Cadet Corps in 1781, and took part in Kosciuszko's rebellion in 1794 and the rebellion of 1830-1831. In his comedy, The Return of the Emissary, published in 1791, he mercilessly criticized the conservative nobility and the traitors-magnates. Very popular and most influential were his dumas (historical

wrote other original dumas, for example, the duma "Bogdan Khmelnitsky".

Later, inspired by Istoriia Rusov¹⁷ and materials provided by his Ukrainian friends, he proceeded to other Ukrainian themes, with particular emphasis on the struggle for the independence of the Ukraine.¹⁸ Ryleev himself indicated the origin of the dumas: "The duma is an ancient legacy of our southern brothers, our own invention!"¹⁹ He also gave his basic reason for writing in this genre: "Through these dumas, I purport to disseminate among our ordinary people some knowledge of the wondrous deeds of our forefathers, to make them proud of their glorious origins, and to make them love their

songs published in 1816) with their call for liberty and independence for Poland. Ryleev translated some of them into the Russian language, e.g. "Glinski".

¹⁷ Istoriia Rusov (History of the Rus' People) was written sometime at the end of the eighteenth or the beginning of the nineteenth century by an unknown author. It is a history of Ukrainian national political thought which had a tremendous influence on the Ukrainian historiography of the nineteenth century. See Ukraine: A Concise Encyclopedia (Toronto, 1963), p. 561. Istoriia Rusov condemns not only the evil deeds of the Catholic priests and magnates, but also the Polonization of the Ukrainian nobility. While dealing with Bogdan Khmelnitsky, the author of Istoriia Rusov promotes republican and anti-monarchic ideas. Furthermore, the author supplies some material proving that the tsarist authority was growing on the blood and bones of the masses. In Istoriia Rusov, the idea of the national dignity of peoples and the condemnation of the autocratic and chauvinistic policy of tsarism ran like a scarlet thread. Its anti-monarchic theme is also closely related to the theme of condemnation of serfdom, characterizing the Decembrists. See Istoriia ukraïns'koi literatury, v. 2 (Kiev, 1967), pp. 97-108.

¹⁸ D. Cizevsky, History of Ukrainian Literature (Ukrainian Academy of Arts and Sciences in the U.S., 1956), p. 388.

¹⁹ Tseitlin, p. 73. The southern brothers are, of course, the Ukrainians. In the dumas, like in songs, words and melodies are combined in one artistic whole, sung always to the accompaniment of kobza-bandura. According to their content, the dumas could be divided into two main groups: a. dumas dealing with the period of wars with the Turks and the Tatars during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; and b. dumas covering the period of the Ukrainian liberation struggle against the Poles. See F. Kolessa, Ukraïns'ki narodni dumy (L'viv, 1920), pp. 4 and 9, and M. Stel'makh, Dumy (Kiev, 1959).

own country even more."²⁰ The poet's approach is didactic, even agitational, since he thus aspired to fight against ignorance ("the mother and daughter of autocracy"),²¹ to increase enlightenment and awareness among the people, to foster in them that socio-political consciousness without which revolutionary change could not be achieved. Of course, Ryleev's view that his dumas were an ancient legacy is not really the case, since there is a basic difference between his dumas and the traditional Ukrainian and Russian folk legends. His dumas feature prominently the declamatory element, so characterizing the eighteenth century Russian poets, in addition to a propagandistic element in line with the prevailing conditions of the time.

In all Ryleev spent about eighteen months on the dumas. In 1823 Ryleev began his longest historical poem "Voinarovsky",²² which he completed in 1824. He then worked on his second longest poem, "Nalivaiko",²³ but left it uncompleted because his political work in the Northern Society made increasingly great demands on his time. Both of these long poems are based on the heroic struggle of the Ukrainians against alien oppression.

²⁰ V.G. Bazanov, "K.F. Ryleev" in Ryleev: Stikhotvorenia, stat'i, ocherki, dokladnye zapiski, pis'ma (Moscow, 1956), p. 14.

²¹ Ryleev's words, Tseitlin, p. 98.

²² Nephew of the Ukrainian Hetman Mazepa, who declared him to be his heir. Aware of Mazepa's attempt at treason, he tried to hinder the latter's undertaking. Nevertheless, he was exiled to Siberia by Peter I because of his association with Mazepa.

²³ Leader of a massive Cossack-peasant rebellion in the Ukraine in 1594-1596 against the Polish and Ukrainian landlord-magnates. Nalivaiko was finally taken captive by the Poles and was executed in 1597.

In the meantime Ryleev had written a number of agitational songs in collaboration with Alexander Bestuzhev. These songs were written on the initiative of Ryleev, who, towards the end of 1822, suggested to Bestuzhev that they cooperate in writing "something liberal in folk language".²⁴ The purpose of the songs was agitation for radical change in society, and, unlike other works in loftier genres, usually written for the intelligentsia, these were directed at rank-and-file soldiers, and the masses generally. They achieved considerable popularity, since the wit and mockery characterizing them reflected the mood of the readers; also, their clarity and pungency added to their appeal. Written in couplets and passed around in manuscript form, they were easy to memorize and sing. Practically anyone could sing them to his own tune.

The year 1823 marked the real beginning of Ryleev's revolutionary activities. In that year he formally entered the Northern Society. At the same time, together with Bestuzhev he co-edited Poliarnaia zvezda (Polar Star), a progressive annual espousing Decembrist views. Three volumes were published in all. In reality, Ryleev at first stood for a constitutional monarchy, as did almost all other members of the Society, but after his contacts with the radical Pestel in 1824, he became an ardent republican. He thus became a factual leader and organizer of a small circle of radicals within the Society. In 1825 he was elected to the Supreme Council of the Society. In the same year his "Voinarovsky" (on the historical events surrounding the nephew of the Cossack Hetman Mazepa) and other significant poems including "Citizen" (a poem concerned with the need to accept the challenge of revolution at the moment the situation was ripe) were published. These poems, to a considerable degree, were effective

²⁴Orlov, p. 617.

in fomenting a revolutionary mood among the progressive-minded people.

Following the death of Alexander I a period of interregnum (November 19 to December 14) ensued. During the period Ryleev became the virtual mastermind of the plans of the Northern Society. Under his direction the plan for the actual uprising on Senate Square was formulated. On the eve of the uprising he presided over a meeting of the Society in his home for the purpose of developing and detailing the mechanics of the revolt. On the fateful day of December 14 he himself was on the Square giving commands and lending encouragement to the rebelling troops. The revolt collapsed on the same day and Ryleev was arrested only a few hours later. After seven months' confinement in a fortress, he and four other arch-conspirators were hung on order of Nicholas I.

CHAPTER II

WARRIORS OF FOREIGN CAMPAIGNS

Igor, Oleg the Seer, Sviatoslav, St. Vladimir, Mstislav the Daring, Ermak, and Yakov Dolgoruky are Russian heroes of foreign campaigns in Ryleev's balladry. The former five belonged to the medieval period, while the latter two were of the seventeenth century. All were the typical examples from Russian history of heroes who fought in the interests of their country, and were basically positive characters for Russian patriots to emulate or admire. All their campaigns bear the common feature of their determination to fight in the interests of their country by effecting its geographical aggrandizement and national glorification. Therefore, it is apparent that the purpose of these ballads, which Ryleev devoted to the warriors of foreign campaigns, was to present artistically the heroic exploits of Russian historical figures and inculcate in the Russian reader a pride in his homeland and its past. For purposes of information and clarification, a brief account of the actual historical events and the role played in them by the historical figures mentioned above is given.

"Olga at the Grave of Igor"

Igor, the son of Riurik, is considered one of the first princes of ancient Rus,¹ over which he reigned from 912 to 945. During his lifetime, he directed two military expeditions: one to Asia Minor and the other to Constantinople. Successful in his campaigns, he exacted tribute from conquered peoples. The Drevliane² paid tribute to Igor until 945. They revolted when he doubled the tribute, and executed him cruelly. His widow, Olga, reigned from 945 to 957. This ballad deals with the visit of Olga and her son to Igor's grave and their reminiscences over his past deeds.

"Oleg the Seer"

Oleg was a close relative of Igor. When Riurik died in 879, Igor was not yet of age. Oleg became his guardian and regent of the state. In this position he was the factual ruler. After conquering Smolensk and Kiev, he made war on Byzantium in 907. Victorious, he was paid tribute by the Greeks and forced them to sign a humiliating peace treaty with Rus' in 911, whereupon he was given the name "The Seer". He died in 912. This ballad concerns Oleg's expedition to Byzantium and his subsequent victory over the Greeks.

¹ Rus' --- first organized Slavic state extant from the ninth to the thirteenth century. Ryleev anachronistically used the term "Russia" in the context of his historical ballads, although the term only came into common usage much later. The reader should always bear this in mind.

² Drevliane --- eastern Slavic tribe (an agricultural people) settled in west central Russia in the ninth and tenth centuries.

"Sviatoslav"

Sviatoslav, Igor's son, reigned from 964 to 972. In Russian history he has been glorified for his successful campaigns against the Balkan peoples along the Danube River and against the Greeks. He was killed in battle with the Pechenegues³ on his return to Kiev. This ballad describes only the campaign against the Greeks.

"St. Vladimir"

St. Vladimir was the youngest son of Sviatoslav. Upon the death of Sviatoslav in 972, civil strife broke out between the supporters of his sons Yaropolk and Oleg. Vladimir, involved in this struggle, slew Yaropolk and was proclaimed Prince of all Rus'. He carried out many forays into neighboring lands. In 987 he sent envoys to study the religion of these lands. He finally chose the Byzantine rite for himself and his people, and all were baptized in 988. He adopted Basil as his Christian name. This sacrament was followed by his marriage to the sister of the Byzantine Emperor Basil the Second. The remainder of his life was devoted to the performance of good works. This ballad portrays St. Vladimir's repentance over his past vicious actions, his depression caused by them, and his acceptance of Christianity as a redemption for his former sins.

³ Pechenegues --- a nomadic Turkic people of the eighth and ninth centuries inhabiting areas between the Volga and the Ural mountains.

"Mstislav the Daring"

Mstislav, son of Vladimir the Great, was an independent prince of Tmutarakan.⁴ In the borderlands of his principality lived the Kosogs, upon whom he declared war in 1022. The sturdy and robust Kosog prince, Rededia, proposed to settle the whole war on the basis of a duel between them. Mstislav agreed and killed Rededia, whereupon the Kosogs submitted to Mstislav's authority. In the chronicles Mstislav is called "The Daring". Proceedings of the duel are highlighted in this ballad.

"The Death of Ermak"

In the sixteenth century Siberia was a Tatar domain with its capital Isker on the Irtysh River. During the century the Tatars periodically invaded neighbouring Slavic lands. In 1581 the Stroganovs, a group of rich Russian merchants and manufacturers, financed an expeditionary force of 840 men headed by Ermak Timofeev for the purpose of defending against and eventually defeating the Tatars. After Ermak indeed crushed the Tatars and seized their capital, he effectively dominated Siberia for three years. On one rainy night in August, 1584, Kuchum, the defeated khan⁵ of the Tatars, launched a surprise attack, and Ermak, in his retreat, drowned in the Irtysh River. This ballad describes the thoughts of Ermak and his death caused by this stealthy attack on the part of Kuchum.

⁴ In the region of the Black Sea and the Island of Taman.

⁵ Tatar chieftain.

"Yakov Dolgoruky"

Prince Yakov Dolgoruky was a soldier-statesman and a close collaborator of Peter the First. Dolgoruky participated in Peter's campaigns in the Crimea in 1695 and 1696. In 1700 in the Narva Campaign he was seized by the Swedes and was a prisoner until 1711, when he escaped. In 1714, in opposition to the views of Peter and the Senate, he opposed the trade pact proposed by the Dutch, under which they were given free trade privileges throughout Russia. In 1717 he was appointed Chairman of the State Collegium, responsible for governmental income and expenditure. This ballad merely depicts Dolgoruky's escape from Swedish captivity.

In general, Ryleev's accounts of the historical events in his ballads are colorful; but because of his romanticizing and exaggeration, they are not always faithful to the facts. The poet based his ballads mostly on Karamzin's history; however, on numerous occasions his presentation involved complete invention. Such neglect of the facts can be explained to a degree by the poet's attitude, views, and behaviour during the years following 1818. As a Russian patriot and progressive thinker of his time, he could be expected to romanticize events for dramatic effect, for the added appeal this would have for the reader. One episode will suffice to demonstrate his idealistic and liberal, at times oversimplified views on the Russian situation and how he personally could effect a change for the better. On the morning of December 14, 1825, the date set for the uprising, Ryleev planned to dress in peasant's costume, knapsack on his back, rifle in his

hand; in this way he proposed to symbolize the union of soldier and peasant in the attempt to overthrow the autocracy.⁶ In any case, of the seven ballads discussed in this chapter, only one involves distortions in their presentation of events. According to historians, Yakov Dolgoruky was seized by the Swedes in the Campaign of Narva in 1700, sent to Sweden in the spring of 1701, and imprisoned there for ten years; Dolgoruky in the ballad, for the sake of a climactic effect, escaped even before he reached Sweden:

Suddenly Dolgoruky began to roar:
 "Follow me. Let's break out of the shameful captivity.
 Let glory be our lot,
 Or we shall die an enviable death".
 Blood flowed, swords flashed,
 The astonished enemy fell,
 And the conquered frigate⁷
 Dashed to conquered Revel.

⁶ Ryleev did not proceed with this plan when his fellow-conspirator Alexander Bestuzhev objected on the grounds that the soldiers were incapable of understanding the meaning of such a display. Mazour, p. 169.

⁷ Ryleev (Moscow, 1956), pp. 134-135: "Вдруг Долгорукий загремел:
 / «За мной! Растро гнем плен постыдный. / Пусть слава
 будет наш удел. / Иль смертию умрем завидной!...» /
 Лилася кровь, сверкал булат. / Пал неприятель
 изумленный — / И завоеванный фригат / помчался в
 Ревель покоренный."

The Drive to Glory

The motivation of these warriors in their foreign campaigns was essentially the territorial aggrandizement or material gain for Russia (or Rus') at the expense of other nations. Igor had conquered the Drevliane, and they had been paying tribute to him. Yet he was dissatisfied: he wanted more; therefore, for the second time, took up arms against them:

The troops gathered in the camp,
In armor for the violent battle,
And flew to the land of the Drevliane,
To collect the tribute of subjection.⁸

His demands were refused, and in the ensuing battle he was seized and slain.

Ryleev describes Oleg's victorious invasion of Byzantium in 907. He exacted tribute from the Greeks and returned in glory:

Gratified by the success of his exploits,
The glory in those lands,
Oleg dashed into the city of his throne
On nimble sails.⁹

⁸ Ryleev, p. 77: "Дружины собралися в стан, / В доспехах ярой брани, / И полетели в край древлян / Сбирать покорства дани".

⁹ Ryleev, p. 75: "Успехом подвигов довольный / И славой в тех краях, / Олег помчался в град престольный / На быстрых парусах."

Early Russian history was marked by a series of campaigns against the Greeks. Sviatoslav's expedition to Byzantium is vividly described in the ballad. Just before the battle, Sviatoslav addresses his soldiers; his words of encouragement are filled with patriotic sentiments:

Comrades, flight will not save us! --
 The hero roared on the battle field --
 Shame will not befall the dead;
 We must fight, willing or unwilling ...
 Let's fight, more bravely, my brave ones;
 Don't shame our dear Fatherland --
 And cast upon our graves
 Heaps of bones of the enemy.¹⁰

The element of the glory of Russia permeates "The Death of Ermak". The hero "breathes" glory, his voice resounds with a call for glorious deeds, even his sleeping comrades evoke visions of glory in his imagination:

You must rest; sweet sleep
 Will soothe the brave in the storm;
 It brings glory to our dreams
 And redoubles the strength of our warriors.¹¹

¹⁰ Ryleev, p. 80: "«Друзья, нас бегство не спасет! — / Гремел герой на бранном поле, — / Позор на мертвых не падет; / Нам биться волей иль неволей ... / Сразимся ж, храбрые, смелей; / Не посрамим отчизны милой — / И груды вражеских костей / Набросим над своей могилой!»"

¹¹ Ryleev, p. 113: " Вам нужен отдых; сладкий сон / И в бурю храбрых успокоит; / В мечтах напомнит славу он / И силы ратников удвоит."

Besides a fervent drive to glory, Ermak's allegiance to his tsar was of prime importance and effect in his conquering Siberia:

Death does not terrify us;
We have accomplished our task:
Siberia is now subject to the tsar,
And not in vain have we lived in this world.¹²

"Tribute", "glory", "fatherland", or "tsar" --- all these played a part as the warriors' driving forces in their campaigns. By the same token Ryleev, too, was motivated by his desire to revive the heroic and patriotic traditions of these heroes of the Russian past. It should be pointed out, however, that Ryleev was basically inconsistent in his attitude and treatment of these figures; the ultimate fact is that on occasions, they were aggressors in the normal sense of the word;¹³ his view of foreign invaders of Russia was totally negative; to him these were "oppressors", bringing a "foreign yoke" to Russia. When we compare the ballads discussed in this chapter with those in the next, (which concern the defenders of the Fatherland) this inconsistency stands out vividly. In "Oleg the Seer" Ryleev took a self-righteous stance in extolling Oleg for his triumph in Byzantium:

Embraced by righteous contempt,
The Russian prince accepts the tribute;
He grants Leo peace,¹⁴
And ceases the fray.

¹² Ryleev, p. 114: "Нам смерть не может быть страшна; / Свое мы дело совершили: / Сибирь царю покорена, / И мы — не праздно в мире жили!" This particular ballad was popular among the Russian people and later served as the basis for a well-known folk song.

¹³ It is interesting to note that the Soviet literary historian Sokrutenko, among others, regards these figures not as "aggressors", but as "military leaders"; see E.E. Sokrutenko, Russkaia literatura XIX veka (Kiev, 1965), p. 25.

¹⁴ Ryleev, p. 75: "Объятый праведным презреньем, / Берет князь русский дань; / Дарит Леона примиреньем — / И прекращает брань."

When in "Dmitry Donskoy" the matter concerned the Tatar invasion of Russia, Ryleev understandably represented the war as condemnable aggression against the Russian land and its people.

Thither! Across the Don! The time has come!
 Our hopes lie in God and the sword!
 Let's strike down the Mongols, and like a heavy load,
 Cast from our shoulders Mamai's yoke.¹⁵

In "Bogdan Khmelnitsky",¹⁶ the poet pictures the Poles as tyrants greedy for land and plunder; they have no redeeming features, and thus are unsuccessful artistic portrayals. Khmelnitsky, the Ukrainian patriot, scornfully addresses the Polish chieftain Chaplitsky:

While you, an alien,
 Tyrant of my native land,
 Fierce tormentor,
 Chaplitsky! Tremble, scoundrel!¹⁷

Black-white Characterization

Ryleev's presentation of his heroes and the villains opposing them is simply a "black-white" representation, which therefore suffers. His characters, with minor exceptions, do not come to life. Thus, terms like "brave", "daring", "fearless", "wise", "righteous" permeate his ballads on the warriors in Russian history, while adjectives like "fearful", "timid",

¹⁵ Ryleev, p. 103: "Туда! за Дон! .. -- настало время! -- / Надежда наша -- бог и меч! / Сразим монголов и, как бремя, / Ярмо Мамая сбросим с плеч!"

¹⁶ This ballad is discussed in detail in the following chapter.

¹⁷ Ryleev, p. 127: "А ты, пришлец иностранный, / Тиран родной страны моей, / Мучитель мой ожесточенный, / Чаплицкий! трепещи, злодей!"

"disgraceful", and "contemptible" are used to characterize the negative figures. This contrast is evident in his ballads generally; in "Oleg the Seer" he writes:

The heroes' valiant force
 The glorious fray
 Merrily enjoined,
 Burning with passionate thirst for battle.¹⁸

The heirs to Brutus and Camille¹⁹
 Were hidden within the walls;
 Luxuries had already corrupted them,
 No courage was in their hearts.²⁰

In "Sviatoslav" this same type of black-white portrayal is prominently featured. After many skirmishes, the Russian forces are still fresh, vigorous, and strong, while the enemy is fleeing the battle in disarray:

Throwing shields on their backs,
 The Slavs marched, like the lions from entrapment,
 Menacing from the mountain heights.²¹

¹⁸ Ryleev, p. 73: "Дружина храбрая героев / На славные дела / Сгорая пылкой жаждой боев, / С веселием текла."

¹⁹ Brutus, Roman republican who led the conspiracy against Julius Caesar. This comparison of the hostile Greek forces to figures like Brutus is not, of course, intended as a criticism of the Roman republicans (whose virtues are emphasized in the works of the Decembrist poets generally). It merely reveals the state of degeneracy and dissoluteness into which these "heirs" had fallen from the lofty state of their "forebears".

²⁰ Ryleev, p. 74: "Потомки Брута и Камилла / Сокрылись в стенах; / Уже их нега развратила, / Нет мужества в сердцах."

²¹ Ryleev, p. 80: "Закинув на спину щиты, / Славяне шли, как львы с ловитвы, / Грозя с нагорной высоты."

Bodies fell in heaps,
And oft the Greeks avoided the fray

.

The enemies' blood turned cold
And their hair stood on end.²²

In his treatment of hero and villain with their respective positive and negative qualities, Ryleev was more concerned with the former and this was reflected in the general emphasis placed on positive figures. The hero-individual Sviatoslav is a warrior, ready to meet and overcome any obstacle in his path in furthering the glory and the interests of his homeland. His profoundly ascetic and self-sacrificing mode of life is looked upon with awe by his compatriots and adversaries alike:

In summer's heat and winter's cold,
The earth beneath the felt -- his couch,
And hungering, horse-flesh was his food.²³

Similarly, the steadfastness of Ermak and his comrades in the face of the severe topographical and elemental conditions of Siberia are reflected and commended in Ryleev's ballad:

The comrades of his efforts,
His triumph and thunderous glory,
Slumbered carefree near the oakgrove
Amidst the scattered tents.²⁴

²² Ryleev, p. 80: "Валились грудами тела, / И грек не раз бежал из боли; / И у врага хладела кровь/ И дыбом становился волос!"

²³ Ryleev, p. 80: "И в летний зной и в зимний холод, / Земля под войлоком одром, / А пищею коника в голод."

²⁴ Ryleev, p. 113: "Товарищи его трудов, / Побед и громозвучной славы, / Среди раскинутых матров / Беспечно спали близ дубравы."

Concerning Oleg and Mstislav, the former was noted for his wisdom and resourceness, the latter for his audacity. In the respective ballads, Ryleev concentrates on the virtues of both:

Meanwhile, contriving the bold onslaught,
Unfurling white sails on every boat
Oleg suddenly moved them out upon the bank.²⁵

Mstislav's valor is pointed up in his immediate and confident acceptance of Rededia's proposal for the duel to settle the issue between their warring forces:

"Ready"! the Russian prince exclaimed,
And, menacingly, faced his foe,
The Daring, like a radiant falcon,
Dismounting, flew upon the hillock.²⁶

The spiritual strength and love for Russia and her glorious traditions inspiring Yakov Dolgoruky sustains him in Swedish captivity:

Ah, best to perish 'midst the grey billows,
Than to live ingloriously in thrall;
Languishing in chains is not the Russian lot,
Nor aimlessly to live the years.²⁷

²⁵ Ryleev, p. 74: "Меж тем, замыслив приступ смелый, /
Ладью свои Олег, / Развив на каждой парус белый, / Вдруг
выдвинул на брег." Ryleev does not mention whether Oleg had wheels
fixed beneath the boats as related in the chronicles. The "bold onslaught"
was essentially Oleg's ingenuity in using sailboats moving on wheels to
confront the enemy in his capital.

²⁶ Ryleev, p. 99: "«Готов!» — князь русский восклицает — /
И, грозный, стал перед бойцом, / С коня — и на курган взлетает /
удалый лесной соколом."

²⁷ Ryleev, p. 134: "Ах, лучше смерть в серых валах, / Чем жизнь
без славы и свободы; / Не русскому стеснить в цепях / И
изживать без дели годы!"

In conclusion and in contrast to the virtues of the hero-individuals, brief mention of one rather sinister act on the part of a typical villain can be made: Kuchum's stealthy, surprise attack in the night on Ermak and his sleeping comrades is effectively described:

Fearful of combat with the hero,
Kuchum, surrounded by the Tatar horde,
By secret path stole to the tents,
Like a despicable thief.²⁸

²⁸ Ryleev, p. 114: "Страшась вступить с героем в бой, / Кучум к шатрам, как тать презренный, / Прокрался тайно тропой, / Татар толпами окруженный."

CHAPTER III

DEFENDERS OF THE FATHERLAND

Of major and direct importance for Ryleev's ballads glorifying the defenders of Russia was the Patriotic War of 1812.¹ This war, in which the poet himself actively participated later, had a significant impact on his general outlook, as on that of all other Decembrist writers. It will be recalled that Ryleev had begun writing poetry during his youth while a member of the cadet corps, but only his personal involvement in the patriotic battle against the foreign invader brought out all the emotion and power characterizing these particular ballads and thereby earned him an honorable place in the history of Russian literature.² Inspired by the heroism of the common Russian soldier, "the peasant in a greatcoat", he wrote "Victorious Song to the Heroes", "On the Destruction of the Enemy", and the ode "Love for the Fatherland". These poems, especially the latter, were the precursors of his patriotic ballads. One further point: his ballads devoted to historical figures and the glorification of the traditions of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples were also closely related to the epopee of 1812;³ Ryleev essentially viewed the past in the over-all context of the recent traumatic but glorious events, so vivid in his mind.

¹ The Napoleonic invasion of Russia.

² See Bazanov's "K. F. Ryleev" in Ryleev, p. 6.

³ Ibid.

In the preface to his collected ballads of 1825, Ryleev definitively characterized the aim of these ballads: "Reminding the youth of the exploits of their forefathers ... is the sure way to inculcate in them a firm attachment to the Fatherland".⁴ Ryleev expanded on these words and singled out the "simple people", for whom the sentiments of love for the country should be stimulated. The poet's efforts in this direction were described by his friend and colleague N. Bestuzhev: "All of Ryleev's activities bear the stamp of love for the Fatherland".

One should state at the outset that the type of love for the Homeland advocated by Ryleev in these ballads was not like that which he attributed to Russian historical figures. It was his own brand of the Decembrist love and patriotism --- patriotism of the nineteenth century free-thinker. Such a disposition by Ryleev stemmed from his observations and belief that since the Reformation people generally had been striving for freedom, whose inevitable attainment constituted the task of the nineteenth century; the people of Russia were a part of the over-all European movement toward liberty.⁵

Ryleev's ballads on the theme of love for the Fatherland can be divided into two categories: those concerned with the patriotic defenders of Russia against foreign invasions, and those devoted to fighters against domestic tyrants. This chapter deals with the patriotic defenders of Russia against foreign invasions.

⁴These words are taken from the great Polish poet Niemcewicz. See A. N. Sokolov, Istoriia russkoi literatury XIX veka (Moscow, 1960), p. 261.

⁵F. M. Golovenchenko, Istoriia russkoi literatury XIX veka, v. I (Moscow, 1963), p. 155.

The heroes of the ballads dealt with here are Mikhail Tverskoy, Ivan Susanin, Dmitry Donskoy, and Bogdan Khmelnitsky. Brief accounts of the historical events in which they were involved are given below to facilitate later the understanding of the poems.

"Mikhail Tverskoy"

Rus' was under the over-all suzerainty of the Tatars in 1304, when the Russian Grand Prince Andrey Alexandrovich died. Prince Mikhail Tverskoy sought to replace him in his position of authority granted by the Golden Horde, but his nephew, Georgy Danilovich, Prince of Moscow, disputed his claim to the throne. Thus, the two princes appealed to the Tatar chieftain, Khan Tokhta, who supported Mikhail's claim. For more than ten years the situation was quiet, but Georgy's ambition for power and his hatred for Mikhail continued unabated. In 1312 Tokhta died and was succeeded by his son Uzbek. The personal animosity between Mikhail and Georgy deepened. In 1315 Georgy began serving at the Tatar chieftain's court. For three years he humbled himself before Uzbek, plied him with gifts, intrigued, and in 1318 married Uzbek's sister Konchaka. Uzbek named him the most senior of all Russian princes and gave him troops. In a battle with Mikhail and his forces, however, he was defeated, and the Tatar commander Kavgady and Georgy's wife were taken prisoner; the latter died soon after the battle. The angered and irritated Uzbek summoned Mikhail, cruelly tortured him, and finally ordered him executed.⁶ This ballad concerns the humiliation Mikhail received at the Tatar camp, his readiness to die for the sake of his people, and his execution.

⁶ The figure Mikhail Tverskoy was well suited to Ryleev's poetic genre, as he followed the general tradition of Decembrist poets in glorifying a lone

"Dmitry Donskoy"

Dmitry Donskoy, son of the Grand Prince of Moscow Ioann Ioannovich, was born in 1350 and ascended the throne in 1362. At the time the Golden Horde was torn by internecine war, as the reigning Tatar Prince Mamai was a weak and unimaginative khan. Dissatisfied with Donskoy, Mamai dispatched Begich, one of his Tatar princes, with a multitude of troops to attack the Russian in 1378, but the Tatars were defeated. The exasperated Mamai, marshalling troops of other tribes, moved to the borders of Rus' and attacked Dmitry on the Kulikovo Plain near the Don River. The battle, won by Dmitry in September, 1380, was one of the fiercest battles ever fought between the Russians and Tatars. This ballad features Donskoy's fiery speech to his soldiers, and describes the fierce battle which followed.

"Ivan Susanin"

During the occupation of Moscow by the Poles (which began in 1610) Mikhail Fedorovich Romanov, the last surviving member of the Rurik Dynasty was in hiding in the province of Kostroma. The Poles wanted to crown Vladislav, son of their own King Sigismund, as tsar of Rus'. In March, 1613, a Polish detachment was dispatched to Kostroma to apprehend and kill Mikhail, this potential threat to their authority. They seized Ivan Susanin, an ordinary peasant in the village of Domnino, and demanded that he lead them to Mikhail's hiding place. Susanin intentionally led them in the opposite direction and managed to warn Mikhail of the danger. When the Poles

hero, fighting a noble battle against overwhelming odds and perishing in the unequal fight.

realized that they had been deceived, they killed Susanin; Mikhail was saved and became tsar after the Poles were driven out of Moscow the same year.⁷ Ryleev vividly describes this episode and Susanin's unswerving love for his native land.

"Bogdan Khmelnitsky"

Zinovy Khmelnitsky, son of a Ukrainian county bailiff, was educated in both the Ukraine and Poland. He participated in the Polish-Turkish War of 1620, and was taken prisoner by the Turks. After two years of captivity he returned to the Ukraine to live in the tiny village of Subotiv. During his absence, a Polish commander, Chaplitsky, attacked his house, flogged his son to death and abducted his mistress Helena. Khmelnitsky appealed to the Polish king Wladislaw in Warsaw on this matter, but received no justice. Khmelnitsky participated in the Ukrainian revolt against the Poles in 1637. He visited France in 1645 and negotiated a treaty with the French, providing them with the military assistance of the Ukrainian Cossacks. With his Cossacks, Khmelnitsky fought with the French against the Spanish Habsburgs. Returning home, he began to prepare for an uprising against the Poles. He joined the Zaporozhian Cossacks and was elected hetman of the Ukraine, and subsequently issued a manifesto to the Ukrainian people, in which he called for a national uprising against the Poles. The Cossacks, assisted by Ukrainian popular masses, defeated the Polish army at Zhovti Vody in 1648. Another overwhelming victory followed at Korsun'. The Ukrainians advanced into Galicia (Western Ukraine) and surrounded the ancient city of L'viv. The liberation movement swept into Byelo-Russia, and the Poles were forced to sign a treaty in Zamos't'e whereby the Ukraine became free. Khmelnitsky was triumphantly received and glorified in Kiev. He became a national hero. The Poles, however, did not rest, and started a new attack on the Ukraine, but were again defeated by Khmelnitsky at Zboriv and were compelled to sign the Zboriv Treaty in 1649. This ballad deals with Khmelnitsky's escape from Chaplitsky and the successful uprising which followed immediately thereafter.

⁷ Susanin's deeds --- the subject of legends and stories --- were among the most striking manifestations of Russian patriotism in the face of foreign oppression. M.I. Glinka, the distinguished Russian composer, based his historical folk opera "Ivan Susanin" on this ballad.

Of the four ballads discussed in this chapter, only "Bogdan Khmelnitsky" involves distortion of historical fact. According to the historical account, Elena Chaplitskaia, wife of Chaplitsky, was a spy who attempted to poison Khmelnitsky. Ryleev's Elena was just the opposite. She admires and loves Khmelnitsky, and attempts to free him from prison. She says to Khmelnitsky:

"Your suffering and bravery
Have inspired respect within my soul
And touched my heart.
I love you, and fervently desire
To deliver you from these fetters;
I have broken the ties with the tyrant;
Be mine. I am yours. Here is your sword."⁸

The Hero Type

Of these four heroes, engaged in preserving the honor and integrity of the Fatherland against foreign oppressors, Susanin alone executed his deed single-handedly. The other three were leaders of armies. However, all are treated by Ryleev as hero-individuals and the fact that their victories were achieved by the Russian troops under them is of minor importance. These heroes carried out their glorious missions in various ways. Dmitry Donskoy, under the onslaught of the Tatar Khan Mamai, boldly leads his fellow fighters to victory:

⁸ Ryleev, p. 128: "«Мученье и вместе мужество твое / Вдохнули
в душу мне почтенье / И сердце тронули мое: / Я полюбила —
и пылала / Из сих оков тебя извлечь; / Я связь с тираном
разорвала; / Будь мой!» — «Я твой!» — «Прими свой меч!» "

And the army of the tyrant fled,
 And the proud bugles were abandoned!
 The khan rushed off to the thick steppes,
 Terror followed him like a clamorous raven,
 The Russian had rent the chains of slavery
 And stood upon the bones of the foe.⁹

In honour of his victory over the Tatars in the battle near the Don, Dmitry was called by posterity Dmitry of the Don (Donskoy).

| Khmelnitsky's battle against the Poles ended in another immense victory over an alien oppressor. The proud Poles were forced to sign a peace treaty, which was the conclusion of a whole series of events in which Hetman Khmelnitsky had been the moving force and effective strategist:

And henceforth freedom was crowned
 Upon the Ukrainian steppe,
 And joy blossomed blissfully
 In villages and towns.¹⁰

For his unprecedented feat, Khmelnitsky, too, was honoured in name: he became God-given (Bogdan).

As pointed out in the historical accounts, two of the heroes suffered defeat at the hands of Russia's enemies. They were swept aside by the oppressors' cunning and, especially, their much superior forces stirred to fury. Such was the case of Mikhail Tverskoy, who won the battle over the Tatar troops sent against him by the khan only to be summoned by the irritated khan, the supreme ruler of the land, who took revenge for his routed forces:

⁹—Ryleev, p. 105: "И побежала рать тирана, / И сокрушен гордыни рог! / Помчался хан в глухие степи, / За ним шумящим враном страх; / Расторгнул русский рабства цепи / И стал на вражеских костях!"

¹⁰—Ryleev, p. 128: "И воцарилася свобода / С тех пор в украинских степях, / И стала с счастием народа / Цвесь радость в селах и градах."

Above the fallen [Tverskoy] flashed
 Daggers and swords ...
 Blood poured in streams from his wounds ...
 And his end came.¹¹

The Orthodox Church later canonized the unfortunate Tverskoy as a martyr.

The example of Susanin is truly legendary in the long history of Russian resistance to foreign oppression: here was a completely insignificant individual, in the literal sense of the word, who accomplished a strikingly magnificent deed. Aware from the start of the consequences of his action, he unhesitatingly and courageously pursued his designs. A simple peasant, he sacrificed himself for the salvation of the Romanov dynasty:

"Die! -- the Sarmats exclaimed to the hero --
 And the whistling sabres flashed above the old man --
 Perish, traitor! Your end has come!"
 And the steadfast Susanin collapsed in wounds!
 The purest blood reddened the purest snow:
 It saved Mikhail for Russia.¹²

Upon his accession to the throne of Russia in 1613, Mikhail Romanov rewarded the descendants of Susanin with a certificate to a section of land near his home village of Domnino.

¹¹ Ryleev, p. 102: "Над упавшим засверкали / Ятаганы и мечи ... / Кровь из язв лилась струею ... / И пробил его конец."

¹² Ryleev, p. 125: "«Умри же! — сарматы герою вскричали — / И сабли над старцем, свистя, засверкали! — / Погибни, предатель! Конец твой настал!» / И твердый Сусанин весь в язвах упал! / Снег чистый чистейшая кровь обагрила: / Она для России спасла Михаила!"

Patriotism and Courage

Ryleev's hero-defenders are all characterized by their manifest patriotism. Although this patriotism involved a profound concern for the common people, Ryleev individualized it for each of his heroes. Dmitry Donskoy, who could no longer endure the rule of the Tatars, rebelled against them:

"How long, comrades, are we
To bow our obedient head before the tyrant
And with the contemptible khan
Dishonour powerful Moscow.¹³

Let's fly — and return to the people
The guarantee of bliss held by foreign lands,
The sacred freedom of our forefathers
And the ancient rights of our citizens!"¹⁴

With Rus' dominated from without by the Tatars, Prince Mikhail Tverskoy's patriotism took the form of endeavoring to achieve concensus among the people:

I love my native country
And am passionately burning to extinguish within her
Our direct responsibility for the misfortune,
The malicious dissension of the princes.¹⁵

¹³ Ryleev, p. 103: "«Доколь нам, други, пред тираном /
Сколнять покорную главу / И заодно с презренным ханом /
Позорить сильную Москву.»"

¹⁴ Ryleev, p. 103: "Летим --- и возвратим народу / Залог
блаженства чуждых стран: / Святую праотцев свободу / И
древние права граждан."

¹⁵ Ryleev, p. 101: "Я любил страну родную / И пытал разрушить
в ней / Наших бед вину прямую: / Распри злобные князей."

His wife ravished, his son hanged, and he himself imprisoned, Khmelnitsky nurtures his hatred for the cruel Chaplitsky, and swears to avenge not only the suffering of his own family, but also that of his village and his homeland:

I will take revenge for the cold contempt
Of the most sacred rights of the people,
I will avenge the murder, plunder,
The misfortunes of wives and daughters.

• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •

For the shed blood, for the tears,
For women, for old men, and for orphans,
For everyone -- and for these irons
My vengeance awaits you!¹⁶

Besides the patriotism expressed positively -- in the demand for freedom for the people and in the need for consensus and agreement among the country's nobility -- and negatively -- in the call for vengeance against the aliens -- there is another kind -- Susanin's -- which involves a spontaneous expression of love for the Fatherland and a willingness for self-sacrifice on its behalf:

"You have taken me for a traitor:
There are none, nor will there be any in Russia!
Here everyone loves his Fatherland from infancy
And will not doom his soul to perdition through treason."¹⁷

¹⁶ Ryleev, p. 126, 127: "Отмстит холдное презренье / К священнейшим правам людей; / Отмстит убийства и хищенье, / Бесчестье жен и дочерей! / ... / За кровь пролитую, за слезы / И жен, и старцев, и сирот, / За все --- и за сии железы / Тебя мое отмщенье ждет!"

¹⁷ Ryleev, p. 124: "Предателя, мнили, во мне вы нашли: / Их нет и не будет на Русской земли! / В ней каждый отчизну с младенчества любит / И душу изменой свою не погубит."

Some reference should be made to the varied reactions of the heroes when under duress. Of particular importance in this regard are Tverskoy and Susanin, who, with everything against them, unswervingly cling to their faith in the cause of freedom and national dignity of Russia. Tverskoy, in Tatar captivity, makes no attempt to escape. He bravely faces death as a sacrifice to the cause and an inspiration to others. To him this is evidently a loftier act than any concern for personal safety. Furthermore, only thus will revenge or retribution against his people be avoided:

There are friends counselling escape, —
 But I will not besmirch
 My unstained honour by flight!
 Indeed, I will not break the law of honour,
 Let my enemy, my tormentor,
 Satisfy his soul in malice
 With vengeance upon me!¹⁸

Tverskoy's spirit of self-sacrifice is shared by Susanin. Despite the promise of the Poles that he will be rewarded for his co-operation, Susanin is determined to lead them away from the hiding place of the young Mikhail. Realizing Susanin's true intentions they are on the point of killing him, but he is resolved to die a heroic death:

"Scoundrel! — the enemies, enraged, cried —
 Die 'neath our swords!" "Your rage is not frightening!
 Who is Russian in heart, will boldly and daringly
 And joyously die for a just cause,
 I fear neither punishment nor death,
 Unswervingly will I die for the tsar and Rus'."¹⁹

¹⁸ Ryleev, p. 101: "Для побега други есть, — / Но побегом
 не уншу / Незапятнанную честь! / Так, прав честь не нарушу; /
 Пусть мой враг, гонитель мой, / Насыщает в злобе душу / Лютым
 мщеньем надо мной!"

¹⁹ Ryleev, p. 125: "«Злодей! — закричали враги, закипев: — /
 Умреши под мечами!» — «Не странен ваш гнев! / Кто русский по
 сердцу, тот бодро, и смело, / И радостно гибнет за правое дело! /
 Ни казни, ни смерти и я не боюсь: / Не дрогнув, умру за царя
 и за Русь!»"

One Soviet critic has attributed to Ryleev, with little apparent justification, the view that Susanin was not at all a monarchist, a faithful son of the tsar ready to give up his life for him, but a man of the people, a democrat and patriot, who died for his fatherland, merely personified by the young Mikhail.²⁰

The Element of Subjectivity²¹

Decembrist literature, of which Ryleev was one of the major representatives, was essentially a tributary off the mainstream of the romantic trend in Russian literature of the early decades of the nineteenth century. The nature of this trend, combined with Ryleev's intentional use of "revolutionary" didacticism by which the reader was to be won over to the cause of revolution, made Ryleev's ballads highly subjective. Although he based his ballads on Karamzin's colorful History of the Russian State and on other sources, he interpreted the historical events and figures in the way he felt most conducive to his didactic approach. Thus, in describing the past, Ryleev sought not so much to recreate historical events as to portray his ideal of a citizen.²¹ The Soviet critic, P.A. Mezentsev wrote: "What is important to Ryleev is not to present the historical figure to the reader in all his vivid and concrete qualities, but to express himself in the form of a story about a historical activist."²² Another critic, Sokrutenko, added:

²⁰ Golovenchenko, p. 153.

²¹ Sokolov, p. 262.

²² P.A. Mezentsev, Istoriia russkoi literatury XIX veka (Moscow, 1963) p. 92.

"The poet compelled his heroes of remote epochs and incidents to think, feel and speak in the spirit and style of the first quarter of the nineteenth century."²³ The impact on the contemporary Russian reader, especially the young, idealistic Russian, which resulted from Ryleev's descriptions of progressive-minded historical personages cannot be stressed enough.

A number of rousing and challenging calls by the heroes to their supporters are present in the ballads, all expressing the poet's subjective views on the historical past and his belief that such calls in the contemporary context could resurrect those traditions and lead the Russian people to a just and free society. Khmelnitsky, immediately following his escape from the hands of Chaplitsky, musters his fellow Ukrainians:

"Comrades -- he exclaimed to the brave --
Follow me, all whose bosom is burning for vengeance,
All who prefer death to slavery,
Who value honour more than anything!"²⁴

Donskoy, plunging into battle with the Tatars, exclaims:

"Against the enemy! Across the Don!
For liberty, truth, and law!"²⁵

²³ Sokrutenko, p. 25.

²⁴ Ryleev, p. 128: "Друзья! — он к храбрым восклицает, — / За мной, чью грудь волнует месть, / Кто рабству смерть предпочитает, / Кому всего дороже честь!"

²⁵ Ryleev, p. 103: "«К врагам! за Дон! — / За вольность, правду и закон! >>"

These two figures are kindred in word, deed, and spirit. Their fiery words, hardly befitting their epoch, would not have been used even by Karamzin, who was not averse to glamorizing events. Actually, Ryleev does not confine his romantic presentation of history to the ballads discussed in this chapter, but follows this procedure in all his poems.

One stylistic point that can be mentioned is Ryleev's use of hyperbole in the narrative in order to achieve more dramatic effect. When Donskoy was on his way to the battle, his troops

Flew, like falcons,
And their banners shaded the opposite bank.²⁶

And on the battlefield

Everywhere blood pours in streams,
The green dale turns crimson.²⁷

The ballad "Bogdan Khmelnitsky" contains a similar description:

Pursuing, like an angel of vengeance,
The hero smote down the enemies everywhere,
And their bodies, unburied,
He scattered as prey to the wolves!²⁸

The Pushkin-Ryleev Correspondence

Unlike many of Ryleev's contemporaries, who dearly valued his ballads, Pushkin regarded them very critically. In a letter to Ryleev in May, 1825, Pushkin wrote: "What shall I tell you about your ballads? ... They are all

²⁶ Ryleev, p. 104: "Летят, как соколы, — и стяги / Противный осенили берег."

²⁷ Ryleev, p. 104: "Повсюду хлещет кровь ручьями; / Зеленый побагровел дол."

²⁸ Ryleev, p. 128: "Преследуя, как ангел ищенья, / Герой везде врагов сражал, / И трупы их без погребенья / Волкам в добычу разметал!"

of the same mould: the description of the place of action, the hero's words, and moral teaching. There is nothing Russian, except the names ... "²⁹ The unfavorable evaluation did not extend to "Ivan Susanin", however, for Pushkin continued: "... excluding "Ivan Susanin", as a result of which I began to suspect in you [the presence of] real talent."³⁰ The approach in "Ivan Susanin" is perhaps the least subjective, and a pronounced stream of realism is present. It contains no long monologue by the hero; events evolve in rapid progression lending an air of tenseness and suspense to the ballad; the detailed description of various scenes are highly realistic and natural.

When Susanin and the Poles enter the peasant hut:

Here a tablecloth is spread on the table,
 Beer and jugs of wine are placed about,
 And Russian kasha and shchi before the guests,
 And bread in huge chunks before everyone,
 While at the windows the roaring wind drums;
 The crackling firewood burns gloomily.³¹

And the starkly realistic description of the forest path, along which Susanin guides the Poles, is a further example of the poet's success:

²⁹ Tseitlin, p. 86.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 82.

³¹ Ryleev, p. 123: "Бот скатерь простая на стол постлана; / Поставлено пиво и кружка вина, / И русская каша и щи пред гостями, / И хлеб перед каждым большими ломтями. / В окончина ветер, бушуя, стучит; / Уныло и с треском луцина горит."

Now it's [the sun] quickly concealed, now it shines brightly,
 Now dimly it glistens, now disappears,
 The oak and birch stand stock-still;
 Only the snow underfoot crunches from the frost.
 At times the raven, taking flight, roars by,
 And the woodpecker chisels a hollow willow.³²

Besides the description of the peasant hut and the forest, other features of this ballad are realistic, for example, the description of the village and the individualized language of the Poles and of the young Susanin.

Pushkin criticized Ryleev's ballads from a "realist"³³ standpoint; thus, he felt that only "Ivan Susanin" merited praise. He was correct in pointing up the stereotyped nature of the ballads generally, but in my view he was much too harsh in denying them any merit on the basis of their subjectivity. In a letter to V.A. Zhukovsky Pushkin had written: "All [of Ryleev's ballads] are inappropriate."³⁴ Pushkin was far in advance of his contemporaries in the matter of purely literary evaluation, and seemingly did not realize the value of subjectivism in art. After all, the first quarter of the nineteenth century still belonged to romanticism, a main feature of which was the romanticising of events, conditions, situations, and individuals. The reading public at the time could not understand the harshness of Pushkin's criticism.³⁵ Actually, the ballads of Ryleev were popular in the circles of

³² Ryleev, p. 124: "То скроется быстро, то ярко блеснет, / То тускло засветит, то вновь пропадет. / Стоят не шелохнясь и дуб и береза; / Лишь снег под ногами скрипит от мороза, / Лишь временно ворон вспорхнув, прошумит, / И дятел дуплистую иву долбит."

³³ Tseitlin, p. 87. Incidentally, this is the favorite term of Soviet critics. In point of fact, however, "realist" is not the proper word here. Ryleev in "Susanin" made abundant use of local flavour and colour in heighten the romantic element of his descriptions; this was a common feature of a number of west European romanticists, e.g., Walter Scott and Lord Byron.

³⁴ Mezentsev, p. 92.

³⁵ Ibid.

the politically progressive readers. They were taken to heart, they emboldened people and inspired them to struggle for the "oppressed freedom of people".³⁶ A fellow Decembrist, F.N. Glinka, commented briefly: "Ryleev's ballads appeared with great luster and caused a great deal of noise." Thus, in my view, not only were Ryleev's ballads not "inappropriate" in the context of the situation of ferment existing at the time, but were actually considered something new by many Russian readers. Ryleev developed the agitational ballad into a relatively significant genre of the period, a genre until then unknown to Russian literature. Bestuzhev, Ryleev's close friend, wrote: "Ryleev, author of the ballads or historical hymns, explored new paths in Russian poetry."³⁷

³⁶ Mezentsev, p. 92.

³⁷ Sokolov, p. 261.

CHAPTER IV

FIGHTERS AGAINST DOMESTIC TYRANNY

To the Decembrists' objective of overthrowing the reactionary regime of Alexander I, the ballads dealt with in this chapter are most relevant and purposeful. They reveal not only the exploits of the forefathers of the Russian people which Ryleev, in the preface to the collection of his ballads, claimed to be his purpose, but are also conspicuous and intentional reminders to the Russian people of the oppressive character of their government. The reactionary, A. M. Bulatov, said simply: "Ryleev's ballads ... are seditious."¹ This is especially true of those analyzed below, since they are the most "revolutionary" and agitational of all in terms of Ryleev's use of historical material to achieve contemporary aims. Tseitlin wrote: "The ballads, in which the fate of the tyrants of Old Rus' were revealed, effectively called to mind the contemporary tyrants of Ryleev's time; reading these works should foster in the progressive youth the idea of putting an end to the government."²

Alexander I ascended the throne in 1801. The first years of his reign seemed to indicate some degree of liberalization. He curtailed the powers of the secret police, lifted the bans on foreign travel and on the

¹ Tseitlin, p. 103.

² Ibid.

importation of books.³ He also urged the State Council to abolish serfdom.⁴ However, the conservative nature of the State Council and Alexander's indecision resulted in the failure of the liberalization. The only notable change brought about by Alexander in regard to serfdom was the law of February 20, 1803, which allowed the landowners the right to free their peasants. Under this law, however, less than one percent of the entire serf population was emancipated.⁵ Nevertheless, the liberal attitude of Tsar Alexander generally gave rise to hopes for reform among a considerable portion of Russia's intellectuals. Unfortunately, from 1812 Alexander was preoccupied with an obscure, mystical Christianity and became increasingly conservative.⁶ He became the moving force behind the creation of the Holy Alliance, established to thwart the liberal movements in all Europe. His preoccupation with his role of "international gendarme" led him to entrust the domestic affairs of the country to the notorious Count Arakcheev, who established the "military settlements" in 1816.⁷ Under his reactionary administration education and the cause of change suffered a heavy blow: liberal professors were fired for "propounding dangerous ideas";⁸ protesting students were exiled; rigid censorship was reinstated; and political issues, such as the institution of serfdom, were excluded from the press.⁹

³ Columbia Encyclopedia, 3rd ed. (New York and London, 1963) p. 45.

⁴ Mazour, p. 2.

⁵ Ibid., p. 5.

⁶ Columbia Encyclopedia, p. 44.

⁷ Mazour, p. 43.

⁸ Ibid., p. 32.

⁹ Ibid., p. 36.

Ryleev well understood the motives behind these reactionary measures. He was keenly aware that despotism fears enlightenment, because ignorance is its best support.¹⁰ Hence no doubt remains that although Ryleev wrote these ballads about historical figures, he had in mind contemporary fighters for the betterment of Russia, whose revolutionary sentiments he hoped to kindle and fortify. The fighters against domestic tyrants in these ballads are Rogneda, Tsarevich Aleksei, and Volynsky. Brief accounts of the historical events surrounding them are given below.

"Rogneda"

In the year 970 the Varangian Rogvolod, leaving his native land, settled in Polotsk, the capital city of the province of Kiry at that time. Rogvolod's beautiful daughter, Rogneda, was already betrothed to the Grand Prince Yaropolk Sviatoslavich, whose brother, Vladimir the Great, seized Polotsk in 980, killed Rogvolod and his two sons, and forcibly abducted Rogneda. Rogneda bore Vladimir a son, Iziaslav. Some time later Vladimir discarded Rogneda, drove her from the palace, and confined her to Lybed Beach near Kiev. Once while out strolling in the vicinity, Vladimir decided to have a sleep and at this time the revengeful Rogneda approached in an attempt to kill him, but he awoke and her attempt failed. Full of wrath he ordered Rogneda to put on her wedding dress and await her execution. At the moment when Vladimir entered the chamber to commit the deed, young Iziaslav, sympathetic to his mother, rushed at him and pushed a sword into his hands, exclaiming:

¹⁰ Sokolov, p. 261.

"Father! You are not alone here. Your son shall be witness to your rage."

The stunned Vladimir forgave Rogneda and sent her with her son in peace to the newly-built city of Iziaslav. This ballad deals with Rogneda's narration of Vladimir's villainy to her son as well as her unsuccessful attempt to assassinate him.

"Tsarevich Aleksei in Rozhestven"

Aleksei was the eldest son of Peter the Great from his marriage with Evdoksia, who was confined to a monastery in 1698. Peter's aversion for Evdoksia greatly lessened his affection for Aleksei. Aleksei was raised by females, then fell under the influence of the reactionary clergy, who abhorred his father. Aleksei became addicted to alcohol and engaged in other excesses, a situation highly displeasing to Peter. Moreover, he was surrounded by members of the clergy and nobility, who were particularly opposed to Peter's reforms. Peter repeatedly warned him to mend his ways, lest he be deprived of his right to succession. In 1716, during Peter's trip to Germany and France, Aleksei fled to Vienna and accepted the protection of Charles VI, his brother-in-law; his intention was to continue living in Vienna until his father's death. Peter sent for him, however, and promised to forgive everything, but as soon as he returned, he was tried by a special tribunal of the clergy and laity. The clergy refused to convict him, but the laity unanimously decreed the penalty of death against him. He died on June 26, 1718, in a cell of the Petersburg Fortress. This ballad describes the secret meeting of Aleksei and the priest, who finally persuaded him to stage a coup against his father.

"Volynsky"

Volynsky began his career of official service during the reign of Peter the Great. After receiving the rank of major-general, he left the military service and became Russian Ambassador to Persia in 1715. In 1737 he was appointed Secretary of State in Petersburg and became active at court. On one occasion he chanced to notice Empress Anna's cold attitude toward Duke Biron, her all-powerful favourite, and emphatically censured the duke and several other powerful figures at the court in an attempt to have them removed. Biron had him tried, convicted, and in 1739, executed. This ballad concerns the monologue of Volynsky (in which he spelled out the type of the ideal citizen) and his execution.

Two ballads, "Rogneda" and "Volynsky", in this chapter involve distortion of historical facts. Historically, Rogneda's act was a personal thing. It resulted from a pent-up desire for vengeance for being callously discarded by Vladimir. Certainly the murder of her father and brothers by Vladimir accentuated her hatred for him. Yet, Ryleev's Rogneda is not merely attempting to avenge these personal grievances; even more she is avenging the hurt to her Fatherland, the affronts to her fellow citizens; thus, he arbitrarily changed Rogneda's motive of revenge.

"Burning my native land,
Everywhere you shed blood in streams,
And transformed Polotsk, wondrous with beauty,
Into debris and ruins."¹¹

¹¹ Ryleev, p. 90: "Испепелив мой край родной, / Рекой ты кровь в нем пролил всюду / И Полоцк, дивный красотой, / Превратил развалин в груду."

In the case of Volynsky, Ryleev intentionally misrepresented this historical figure's character. According to Kh.G. Manshtein,¹² Volynsky possessed a broad intellect, but he was a man cunning, proud, and quarrelsome, who wanted to have Biron and other powerful figures removed from the court. The poet describes him as a man "clear in soul and righteous in deed",¹³ who "revealed the cause of people's misfortunes",¹⁴ was a "faithful son of the Fatherland"¹⁵ who died a "faithful friend of the people".¹⁶

Heroes of Resistance

Ryleev's freedom-fighters are essentially characters who fight against despotism over the Fatherland as a whole, or merely despotism over individuals. (However, it must be pointed out that the latter struggle has significant bearing on the former, as far as the ballads in this chapter go.) These hero-individuals struggle against heavy odds in bringing about changes in attitude and deed. Ryleev writes, for example, that Volynsky,

¹² Manshtein (1711-1757), author of Journal of Russia 1727-1744. This journal contains detailed information on the court life of, and the domestic situation in Russia during this period.

¹³ Ryleev, p. 142: "Душою чист и прав в делах."

¹⁴ Ryleev, p. 143: "Открыл вину народных бедствий."

¹⁵ Ryleev, p. 142: "... верный сын отчизны."

¹⁶ Ryleev, p. 143: "... верный друг народа."

Despising punishment and Biron,
Alone dared speak the truth
About the newcomer at court.¹⁷

As a result of his abortive attempt to have the Empress' favourite removed, Volynsky was shackled and, finally, he

Bowed his head without fear,
The blade of the sword flashed,
And the block was sanctified by blood.¹⁸

Aleksei, resentful of his father, was persuaded by members of the clergy, apprehensive about the "ruin of the Orthodox Church" as a result of Peter's reforms, to stage a palace coup.

I will call down the gods of thunder
Upon my father and tsar.¹⁹

In order to avenge the criminal acts against her homeland, Rogneda musters her female courage in an attempt to assassinate Vladimir:

She takes the heavy sword from the wall ...
Proceeds ... pauses ... and moves forward

• •

The sword is already raised! ...²⁰

Unfortunately, the assassination attempt fails, as a thunder bolt awakens Vladimir just in time.

¹⁷ Ryleev, p. 142: "Презрев и казнь и Бироном, / Дерзнул на
примела один / Всю правду высказать пред троном."

¹⁸ Ryleev, p. 143: "И голову склонил без страха; / Сверкнуло
лезвие меча — / И кровью освятилась плаха!"

¹⁹ Ryleev, p. 140: "«Сберу перуны / На отца и на царя!»"

²⁰ Ryleev, p. 89: "Меч тяжкий со стены снимает ... / Идет ...
стоит ... ступила вновь ... / ... / Уж поднят меч! ..."

The Patriotic Element

Ryleev's fighters against domestic tyranny have one thing in common: they all profoundly love their fatherland. Yet their patriotism is expressed in various ways. Volynsky loves his country and believes in the citizen's obligation and duty to tell the truth to its ruler, no matter how unpalatable that truth might be, and irrespective of the consequences:

Who is slave to contemptible vanity
Is not a faithful son of the Fatherland,
Not a useful citizen of the tsar
In the country of autocracy.
Let him be a man of counsel
And a martyr to shameful punishment,
But stand for truth and justice,
Like Dolgoruky, without fear.²¹

Tsarevich Aleksei conspired against Peter, because the latter's reforms were stripping Russia of her ancient traditions. Whether these traditions were worthy of preservation or not is irrelevant; Aleksei sincerely felt that the reforms were doing irreparable harm to the country, and that he was acting in its interests in opposing his father.

Everything now is to be scorned,
The morals and rights of our forefathers
And their sacred customs
And our dear Moscow.²²

²¹ Ryleev, p. 141: "Не тот отчизны верный сын, / Не тот в стране самодержавья / Царю полезный гражданин, / Кто раб презренного тщеславья! / Пусть будет муж совета он / И мученик позорной казни, / Стоять за правду и закон, / Как Долгорукий, без боязни."

²² Ryleev, p. 140: "... уж все презренно --- / Предков нравы и права, / И обычай их священный, / И родимая Москва." The decision to regard Aleksei as a hero in this study is an arbitrary one, and is based solely on Ryleev's bestowing the mantle of hero upon him. Obviously, the role he played in the historical events of his time was negative and reprehensible, rather than heroic.

Rogneda's fight was personal, involving the emotions and a desire for revenge, according to Ryleev, however, she was impelled by a sense of indignation against the murderous rule of Vladimir in her homeland, and sought to redress the grievances at one stroke by murdering the tyrant. Caught in the act of attempted murder, she is asked by Vladimir: "What about the duty of a spouse, what about love?" Her answer is forthright:

"Love! For whom? ... For you, a killer?
Have you forgotten who murdered my father?
You, you, tyrant, killed him!
You deprived me of my husband,
Burning my native land,
Everywhere you shed blood in streams."²³

The Element of Psychological Analysis

Psychological analysis of characters does not play a major part in Ryleev's ballads. In regard to the ballads under discussion, however, it is of some importance and should be examined briefly. In "The Head of Volynsky",²⁴ Tsarevich Aleksei in Rozhestven", and "Rogneda" Ryleev emphasizes and expands upon human vulnerability. The characters of these ballads reveal considerable indecision and weakness, when confronted by difficult situations, in which the choice to be made have the air of finality. In particular cases their indecision involves moralizing, anxiety, even repentance. Rogneda, motivated by personal and patriotic desires to commit the murder, is indecisive in executing the deed as a result of her basically

²³ Ryleev, p. 90: "«Любовь! к кому? ... к тебе, губитель?/ Забыл ты, кем убит родитель! / Ты, ты, тиран, его сразил! / Ты жениха меня лишил / Испепелив мой край родной, / Рекой ты кровь в нем пролил всюду.»"

²⁴ Ryleev wrote two ballads on Volynsky: "Volynsky" and "The Head of Volynsky". In the latter Ryleev depicted how the mutilated head of Volynsky haunted Empress Anna.

human instincts and her essential femininity. She experiences bold and timid impulses:

[She] hardly changes her breath.
Within her the blood now boils, now chills
Here ... she approaches the couch ...²⁵

Even the relatively minor emphasis that Ryleev places on psychological analysis lends an air of credibility to the characters; in some cases even the negative characters are possessed of sincere, although perhaps mistaken, aims. A number of examples of this feature can be cited. At the moment when Vladimir orders that his sword be brought for the execution of his wife, his son Iziaslav rushes forward exclaiming:

"Here is the sword! If you be not my father,
Kill, O cruel one, kill the mother before the son!"²⁶

These words resound like a thunder bolt across the sky. Vladimir is dumbfounded, and looks at his son in horror, at Rogneda with vengeance. Trapped in a state of mental conflict between love for his son and hatred for his wife, he yields and forgives Rogneda.

Empress Anna's pangs of conscience are even more vividly portrayed. After having Volynsky executed, she is obsessed with sombre thoughts.

²⁵ Ryleev, p. 89: "Едва дыханье переводит ... / В ней то кипит, то стынет кровь ... / Но вот ... к одру она подходит ..."

²⁶ Ryleev, p. 92: "«Вот меч! коль не отец ты ныне, / Убей! убей, жестокий, мать при сыне!»"

"Oh, where am I to find peace for my soul!

• •

In the din of feasts and in quietude
Repentance tears at me;
It reminds me of Volynsky
From the depth of my heart!"²⁷

Suddenly Volynsky's head dripping with blood, the eyes glaring vacantly, looms up before her. In this ballad Ryleev seemingly relishes the use of the supernatural. The head of Volynsky not only appears, but speaks to Anna; it summons her to God's judgement for payment of her deeds. It is apparent that Ryleev profoundly values the courage of Volynsky: of all his historical heroes, only to Volynsky did the poet devote two of his ballads. One could surmise that in the figure of Biron Ryleev really saw Arakcheev, the very personification of the reactionary government of the time, and deliberately played up the significance of Volynsky's ghost in order to make the parallel between the two even more striking. The monologue of Anna and her self-torment, which comprise one half of the entire ballad, indicates the degree of importance Ryleev attaches to psychological analysis on this occasion at least.

"The Head of Volynsky" is the most significant ballad in terms of psychological analysis. Yet there are others which, through the use of a few well-chosen words, involve a psychological treatment of characters. Such

²⁷ Ryleev, p. 145: "«О, где найду душе покой?» / ... / «И в шуме пиршеств и в тиши / Меня раскалье терзает; / Оно из глубины души / Волынского напоминает!»"

is the case in "Tsarevich Aleksei in Rozhestven", when Aleksei is urged by the monk to stage a palace coup:

"I am ready, Holy Father!
But, you see, he is my father."²⁸

The last line effectively illustrates the conflict in Aleksei's mind; on the one hand his ambition and his dissatisfaction with the social and political situation, on the other the feeling of a normal, dutiful son.

Generally speaking, Ryleev emphasized psychological analysis only when portraying the heroes who did not triumph in their deeds, because it was the best way for him to get his message across to the reader. Tseitlin wrote: "The author of the ballads still did not know how to explore the spiritual wealth of his own heroes; however, it would be wrong not to see in the ballads his efforts at psychological analysis."²⁹ Tseitlin is right, yet one must doubt the accuracy of the former point of his criticism, because in regard to heroes like Ivan Susanin, Mikhail Tverskoi, Ermak, and Volynsky, who were overcome by the odds, the highest value could only be their spirit and purpose. In the case of triumphant heroes, "deeds spoke louder than words", and consequently Ryleev saw little need for psychological analysis. After all, the cause of right had triumphed.

²⁸ Ryleev, p. 139: " Я готов, отец святой! / Но ведь он —
родитель мой ... > "

²⁹ Tseitlin, p. 87.

CONCLUSION

All of Ryleev's ballads discussed in this thesis have a number of major features in common. These include: the hero-type, patriotism, a pronounced black-white portrayal of the characters; elements of subjectivity and, to a lesser degree, psychological analysis. These are dealt with below.

Ryleev's type of hero was, with one exception¹, artistically unsuccessful. Because the poet persists in romanticizing the hero and exaggerating his virtues, the latter does not come to life. Thus, Dmitry Donskoy and Bogdan Khmelnitsky valiantly fight against the enemies of their homeland, and Ivan Susanin cunningly deceives the Poles. In line with the general method used by Decembrist poets, all struggle against considerable odds in their just cause. In like manner Oleg gloriously subdues the Greeks, Sviatoslav leads an overwhelmingly successful campaign against a formidable enemy, Mstislav triumphantly defeats the robust alien prince in the duel, Ermak bravely crushes the Tatars, and Volynsky fearlessly speaks out the truth against the favorite of the Empress. Even though Susanin, Ermak, and Volynsky perish in their struggle, the cause for which they sacrifice themselves still lives on. All possess great physical strength and spiritual power: "[Mstislav] like a radiant falcon, ... flew upon the hillock."²; "The Russian [Donskoy] had rent the chains of slavery."³; "Death does not terrify us [Ermak and his

¹ Ivan Susanin.

² See p. 32 above.

³ See p. 40 above.

fellow fighters].";⁴ "Languishing in chains is not the Russian [Dolgoruky] lot."⁵

Patriotism plays a very significant role in Ryleev's balladry. In essence, all the ballads of the three categories discussed in this thesis have a bearing on the theme of patriotism. The ballads devoted to the defenders of the Fatherland have, of course, direct bearing, since the struggle against foreign oppression is a manifestation of affection for the Fatherland; events of this nature are Donskoy's battle against the Tatars, Khmelnitsky's revolt against the Poles, and both Susanin's and Tverskoy's readiness to die for the benefit of the Fatherland. On the other hand, the ballads of the other two categories have indirect bearing: the fighters against domestic tyranny, such as Volynsky and Rogneda, endeavor to bring about justice, which in turn should contribute to the well-being of the Fatherland; the heroes of foreign campaigns, like Oleg, Sviatoslav, Mstislav, are, in most cases, bent on the aggrandizement of the Fatherland, which can be interpreted as an extreme manifestation of their patriotism, and which Ryleev himself deemed as something worthy of pride on the part of the Russian people.

The presentation of the characters in the ballads is of a "black-white" nature. Therefore, heroes are always depicted with complimentary terms, and villains with perjorative ones. There is no mistaking the distinctive portrayals of the positive and negative personages. Thus, while

⁴ See p. 28 above.

⁵ See p. 32 above.

"[Oleg's] valiant forces ... thirst for battle,"⁶ "[the Greeks] were hidden within the walls";⁷ after "[Sviatoslav's] Slavs marched like the lions from entrapment",⁸ "the Greeks avoided the fray";⁹ when "[Ermak's] comrades slumbered carefree near the oakgrove",¹⁰ "Kuchum ... by secret path stole to the tents";¹¹ and "[Volynsky] bowed his head without fear before the sword",¹² and "repentance tore at [Anna, who knew not] where to find peace".¹³ Being a romanticist poet and a contemporary political activist, Ryleev is thinking of the present in his treatment of history. The heroes of his ballads devoted to the old, unenlightened days think, speak, and act like the contemporaries of the 1820's. Thus, Donskoy talks about "law", Volynsky advocates "truth and justice", and Khmelnitsky struggles for "people" and "freedom". The cliches these heroes use and the tone in which they express themselves are just like those of the Decembrists. Such subjectivity appears not only in the portrayal of the heroes, but in the events too. Of the fifteen ballads discussed in this thesis, four of them involve either complete invention or partial exaggeration of the historical events.

⁶ See p. 30 above.

⁷ See p. 30 above.

⁸ See p. 30 above.

⁹ See p. 31 above.

¹⁰ See p. 31 above.

¹¹ See p. 33 above.

¹² See p. 57 above.

¹³ See p. 61 above.

The role of the element of psychological analysis, although relatively minor, should not be neglected. In cases where the hero is successful in his undertaking, Ryleev hardly uses it, since deeds speak loudest. Only when the cause fails, or when the hero falls victim to it, then the poet makes use of psychological analysis as a means of heightening the spiritual value of the hero, as in the cases of Volynsky, Susanin, Rogneda.

Finally, while Ryleev heightens the role of the hero-individual and attributes all the exploits to him, the masses, which constitute a very substantial, even decisive element in the success of all the campaigns, should have been given some attention. Ryleev, like all other Decembrists, in his attitude, behaviour, and literary work, deliberately plays down, even distrusts the help of the masses. Nevertheless, the fact that the masses were on the side of the heroes was decisive in the poets' appreciation of the heroes and in their attributing to these heroes a moral and just character.

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